



Jim
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Olympia Report



State Senator • 15th District

March 14, 2003

On March 10, most of the work in the Senate moved out of the policy committees to the Senate chambers. Several dozen bills were approved by the committees and are now ready for full Senate action. The period for the Senate to pass its own bills ends on March 19 at 5 p.m. At that time, Senate policy committee work begins again to consider bills passed by the House.

Once the work began in the Senate chambers, Senate Republicans quickly passed several important bills to "Get Washington Back to Work." These measures are now in the House State Government Committee:

SB 5254 - This measure allows businesses to challenge state rules and regulations in the county court where the owner lives, works or holds property. Currently, all rules must be challenged in Thurston County courts – a burden to businesses from other parts of the state, especially Eastern Washington.

SB 5052 - This measure delays the implementation of significant rules. Under this measure, the Legislature has the opportunity to decide whether the rule is in keeping with the intent of the law on which the rule is based.

SB 5766 - This measure requires state agencies to tell businesses about a new rule, how to appeal the rule and how to comply with the rule.

Workers' compensation benefits simplified. The current system to provide injured workers with assistance has grown more complex and costly for employers and employees over the years. To keep up, the Department Labor and Industries increased workers' compensation rates by an average of 29 percent this year for employers and employees. Because of this, employers will pay an additional \$166 million and workers will contribute \$99 million more. These increases are forcing businesses to not hire more workers or close their doors completely. Business failures cost jobs. **SB 5378**, which I prime-sponsored, makes the workers' compensation program fair and consistent and will help both employers and people who need jobs. The measure reduces delays in delivering payments to injured workers and gives 70 percent of workers an increase in wage replacement and pension payments.

Under this bill, Labor and Industries is required to:

- Calculate wages using the highest four consecutive quarters in the last two years
- Exclude fringe benefits from the calculation of wages; and
- Pay compensation for lost wages at 65.6 percent of the worker's wage.

This measure is now in the House of Representatives.

Senate increases penalties for traffic disruption. **SB 5953** makes intentional and unlawful disruption of traffic on a highway of statewide significance a gross misdemeanor. That charge carries a potential penalty of up to one year in prison, a \$5,000 fine, or both. While supporters of the measure agree that people have the right to protest, they say it shouldn't be done in a way that infringes on the rights and safety of others. This measure is now in the House of Representatives.

Senate approves charter schools bill creating a new choice for parents. After protracted debate, Senate Republicans won for parents the right to send their children to a new kind of public school. Since 1999, 39 states have created charter schools. Charter schools allow for a high degree of freedom in the classroom in exchange for a high degree of public accountability. Under **SB 5012**, a charter school in Washington may be sponsored by a school district or a state four-year college or university. The measure allows for five charter schools to be created in the 2003-04 school year and five in the 2004-05 school year. In the succeeding school years, up to 15 charter schools may be created each year for a total of 70. Creating charter schools within a school district is optional. A district is not required to even grant a hearing to begin the process. This measure now goes to the House Education Committee.

Bill prevents water waste, protects water rights. Water rights holders must monitor their annual consumption of water because it greatly affects their future water use. **SB 5106** allows water rights holders to be credited with the difference between their peak historic use of water and their current consumption of water.

Committee assignments:

Agriculture and Rural Economic Development

Environmental Quality and Water Resources

Ways and Means

Republican Assistant Whip

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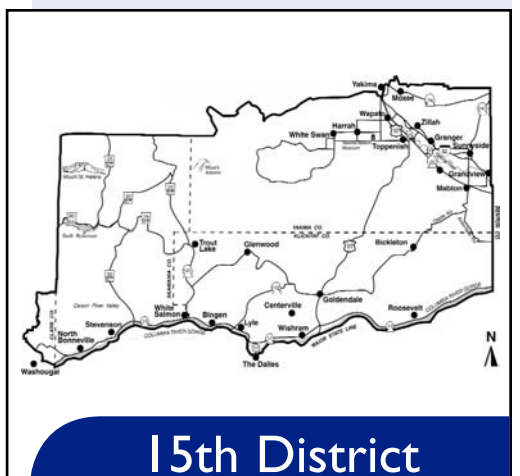
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15th District



Supporters claim people were forced to waste water because if they didn't use it one year, they wouldn't be able to use it the next year. In addition, the bill allows water rights holders to change their water use within a general agricultural category without having to go through the long and arduous process of applying for a new water rights application. SB 5106 is now in the House of Representatives.

Significant regulatory reform measures introduced by Senate Republicans garnered more support this week with the endorsement of the governor. Those bills include: **SB 5256** requires that a cost-benefits analysis be completed early in the rule-making process and must be part of the rule-making debate. This is a significant change especially for small businesses. The Senate has already approved this bill.

SB 5766 requires the departments of Employment Security, Labor and Industries, Ecology and Natural Resources to notify businesses affected by a new rule. Currently, only those businesses that know to ask for notification receive it. Otherwise the rule is simply published in the Washington Administrative Code. New rule notification to all affected businesses must include how to appeal the rule and how to get help complying with the rule. This bill passed the Senate on March 6.

SB 5694 eases the burden of the environmental review and permitting process by requiring an integrated permit system that will make the process for businesses a lot more effective and efficient. This bill is on the Senate's second reading calendar.

SB 5521 would be a huge help to small businesses who struggle with the cost of providing health care benefits to their employees. This measure removes some of the expensive mandates that must be part of that coverage. Reducing health care costs means small businesses will have more money to put

toward growing their business and creating new jobs. The Senate passed the bill this week.

Keeping people working is the aim of a minimum wage bill passed by the Senate this week. **SB 5697** changes how the minimum wage rate is adjusted for inflation. Currently, this adjustment occurs on a date certain (September 30). SB 5697 uses the adjusted rate of inflation for those months that the Washington employment rate was lower than the national employment rate. Agricultural employers, nonprofit organization representatives and hospitality industry representatives testified in favor of this bill. All of these groups report the rising minimum wage is causing them to eliminate staff.

Up-to-date information about the work of the Senate on a daily basis is available at the Senate Republican web site: <http://www.src.wa.gov> – please come visit. Toll Free Legislative Hotline: 1-800-562-6000 and TTY is 1-800-635-9993

To the people of Stevenson, please accept my apologies for not including your town on the 15th District map featured on the front page of this update. Stevenson is an important part of our district. In order to save money, we will use up the current supply of the paper for the session updates and then add Stevenson to the map when we reorder paper for these updates.

As a way to help cut mailing costs, I'm offering to send my session updates to you via e-mail. If you would like to receive future updates by e-mail, please call my Olympia office at (360) 786-7684 or e-mail my session aide Patrick Connor at connor_pa@leg.wa.gov.

Please use this space for any comments, suggestions or problems you would like me to know about.
Or call the toll-free legislative hotline at 1-800-562-6000.



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